LENIN AND THE ORGANIZATION OF THE BOLSHEVIK PARTY, 1897-1903

BY

NELSON FRANCIS NORMAN

A.B., Stanford University, 1939

A.M., Harvard University, 1941

AN ABSTRACT OF A THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN HISTORY

IN THE GRADUATE COLLEGE OF THE

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS, 1948

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R. UNIV.
BIBLIOTHEEK
LEIDEN

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PROBLEM OF MATERIALS

The "iron curtain" is not solely a post-World War II invention designed to obstruct the view of Western students who desire to analyze Russian affairs. In 1904, about the end of the period with which this thesis is concerned, Paul Louis wrote in the *Revue Bleue*: "It is extremely difficult for Western peoples to understand contemporary Russia, and what is going on in the minds of the Russian people. It would seem that a thick wall, or an impenetrable curtain, separates the rest of the world from the one hundred and thirty millions of Muscovites."

The addition of forty-five years, and of seventy millions of Muscovites, has not made the problem of discerning what occupied Russian minds a generation or two ago any easier than discovering what they were thinking yesterday. For awhile it was believed that study of at least pre-Revolutionary Russian materials would be made easier once the exigencies of our latest World War were removed. Such, of course, has not been the case. Travel within Russia has been banned for students as much as for any other class of visitor.

Access to Russian libraries is almost an impossibility. Access to materials within those libraries is restricted to publications which the Soviet regime can afford to publish and chooses to distribute. Some collections unfavorable to that regime have been placed beyond reach; some series have been discontinued. However, the Russian embassy in Washington, through the Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute, attempts to cooperate in every way to furnish materials which are available.

It is the intent of this writer to continue his studies on this subject, preferably within Russia, as soon as that is feasible. In the meantime, he has been dependent upon materials available within the United States.

There is a movement at present to coordinate the extremely spotty materials which are available in the different American libraries. The aim is to provide a central listing for students, with provisions to make accessible needed materials in one form or another. This is a splendid start to make best use of the limited sources we have, but it has not developed into a completely workable system as yet. Further, it will leave the student dependent upon just those materials which came out of Russia haphazardly before stringent restrictions were imposed.

It could not, of course, help in the preparation of this study.

The evidence utilized in writing this thesis was accumulated after diligent search through the usual channels available to graduate students. It is apparent, however, that no very large volume of materials exists with relation to this problem, either in manuscript or in published form. This is due to the conspiratorial, and therefore impermanent, nature of many of the pamphlets, controversial leaflets, and closely limited editions of more ambitious works which have been victims of time, carelessness, or the police. Therefore it seems reasonable to assume that, even granted access to Russian libraries, no very great volume of additional sources is preserved there covering this period of Party development. There are but few translations into Western European languages of Russian works bearing on this subject. There are still fewer original works in those languages viewing this problem from the outside. There are almost no contemporary notices of this movement in the vast periodical literature which was poured out all over Europe around the turn of the century.

By force of such circumstances, the method followed in accumulating evidence has had to be to work through omnipresent official Party histories, memoirs, and collections of the writings of Party leaders. These provide voluminous documentation. The next step in the approach was to weigh and balance such works against the relatively rare non-official and oppositional writings where they were obtainable. A lack of competent secondary analyses forced dependence upon the sources for judgments as well as for information. It was extremely hard, in most instances, to find objective reporting of historic events or developments. Indeed, it is believed that one of the best contributions which a dissertation such as this can hope to make is to provide a start toward the writing of a Party history which attempts to steer clear both of uncompromising partisanship and violent antagonism.

A summer's work in Widener Library at Harvard suggested the following approach as being most profitable: to use the bibliographies of Ernest Drahn, *Lenin: Vladimir Il'ic Ul'janov;* R. J. Kerner, *Slavic Europe;* Gankin and Fisher, *The Bolsheviks and the World War* (Hoover War Library Publication No. 15), pp. 729-770; and A. D. Eikhengolts, "Lenin-vozhd VKP (b) (Bibliograficheskie materialy)," in *Proletarskaia Revoliutsiia,* No. 3, (1934), pp. 273-294.

These pointed the way to many biographies of Lenin, of more or less value, to Party histories, and to works by and about other prominent figures which could furnish a view of the background of the period being considered. Next, the main outlines of the topic were established from Lenin's own works and those of his wife, N. K. Krupskaya. Among the more valuable works of Lenin's associates were those of Martov, Trotzky, Plekhanov, Struve, Zinoviev, Akimov, and Axelrod.

Some valuable insight was gained from estimates of Lenin by Kautsky in the international arena and by Bobrovskaya as an underground Party worker within Russia. The Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute furnished detailed published accounts of the proceedings at the Second Party Congress, and these were supplemented by the accounts of attending national groups which appeared in *Proletarskaia Revoliutsiia.*

Pares, who provides such a mine of valuable information on details of political administration, offered very little on this phase of revolutionary development, and that little was apt to be inaccurate. Other secondary works, which required care in using, were those of G. H. Perris, Arthur Rosenberg, A. J. Sack, and John Spargo. None related directly or chiefly to the problem in hand. Wallace's *Russia,* though out-dated, managed to retain much of the validity of its judgments, and to remain exceedingly timely concerning events both of 1903 and of today. Vernadsky's general *History of Russia,* though treating these events in only a very minor way, offered the best perspective and preserved a portion of the relative importance of these affairs among the surrounding events of the period.

In contrast to the materials problem connected with many topics, on which innumerable materials are available, in this instance the task was one of accumulation and selection rather than of elimination.

APPROACH FOLLOWED IN THESIS

Many, if not most, historians heretofore have assumed that Bolshevik Party ideas date their origin from the Bolshevik-Menshevik split which occurred in the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party at the Second (London) Congress of 1903. It has been further held that Lenin, from then on, in a fit of angry defiance of those who disagreed with him, began that party reorganization and evolved those distinct and unique Party principles which culminated in what we know as Bolshevism.

With that opinion we are forced to disagree. Those Leninist elements which distinguish the Bolshevik Party from all other political parties, and are inseparable from its organizational structure, had already been worked out by some date prior to the split of 1903. The Second Congress merely underlined the extent to which Lenin had departed from Western party models, and it emphasized the distinctions between the group which recognized and accepted this departure and the group which refused to accept the limitations upon individualism which Lenin's adaptations required.

Hence, to discover when and how this concept had developed, it was necessary to turn back to Lenin's pre-1903 writings and activities to determine what had prompted his transformation of the conventional party-model into his new pattern. A knowledge of the factors contained in this pattern is important to us today, for in a surprisingly complete measure the outlines of Leninist Bolshevism have been preserved intact in today's Communism.

In turning back to the pre-1903 period, three distinct phases of activity could be seen to have occupied Lenin's time and attention. First was Lenin's important formative activity prior to 1897, with the locale primarily in St. Petersburg. Second was his period of Siberian exile, 1897-1900. Third was the period of his journalistic activity, 1900-1903. As Lenin's pre-exile experiences were exploratory and experimental, for the purposes of limiting the topic to those bounds within which his ideas had crystallized and had achieved the semblance of a cohesive system, it seemed advisable to begin with his period of exile.

As these three years did not fit the popular picture of exile conditions, complete with salt-mines and frequent lashings by Tsarist police, but furnished instead a period of reflection and careful study under relatively pleasant and favorable conditions, it was felt that within that time Lenin's formulations of Party principles probably took place. Two circumstances served to confirm that impression: one was the progressive clarification of his thought which is revealed in his letters, and the other is his development of plans for a phase of Party activity which he took up immediately upon his release from exile, the establishment of the newspaper *Iskra* (The *Spark*: so named from its epigraph, "From the spark shall leap forth the flame," which was the exiled Decembrists' reply to greetings sent them by the poet Pushkin.)

It is in Lenin's journalistic activity that we can discern the foundations of his concept of Party, and can observe the first workings of his Party organization. The importance of this sphere of his activities was recognized and proclaimed by Lenin in *Iskra* No. 4, when he spoke of his newspaper as " . . . . not only a collective propagandist and collective agitator, but also as a collective organizer." We can agree with this estimate, after analysis of the problems connected with publishing and editing *Iskra,* and with making *Iskra* an effective revolutionary arm within Russia.

Publishing Iskra.—Financing *Iskra* proved to be, as it does for so many organizations, one of the main factors promoting discipline and order. Due to the unusual pressures upon this revolutionary organization, the problem of finances was never completely solved. It is a tribute to the *Iskra* group that the paper appeared as often as it did and was distributed as widely as it was, when handicapped so severely by inadequate funds.

A revolutionary party must be conspiratorial. The paper proved to be an ideal training ground for conspirators, by virtue of its illegal printing and distribution of subversive literature in face of harshest censorship and police opposition. Starting from the clumsy pamphleteering precedents of the St. Petersburg days, *Iskra* had soon developed an effective all-Russian organization which everywhere served as the rallying ground for Party information and activity.

Editing Iskra.—The problems arising within *Iskra's* editorial board were those of Lenin's relation to the Party. The old party leaders living as emigrés in Switzerland, such as Plekhanov, Zasulich and Axelrod, at first spurned the paper, not realizing its potential importance. As its successes mounted, their position on the board became one of partial limitation to the absolute control by Lenin, whom they considered a parvenu in the Russian Social Democratic Party.

Lenin established his central office in London, in order to ensure his more complete control of the paper by removing it from the continual close scrutiny of his associates. As the paper developed into one of the most important Party activities, by controlling it, his influence on the Party as a whole became much greater. Disputes among editors became frequent, and it was hoped that the addition of Trotzky to the board would break the continual deadlocks which arose. One of the more important altercations involved maintenance of relations with Struve, whom

Lenin opposed successfully. Repudiation of Struve, although it angered those editors of the "Struvefreundliche Partei," was tantamount to renunciation of those Western Liberal traditions for which Struve stood. Editorial conflicts remained until after the Second Congress, and, with some curious realignments among the factions, contributed to the split which ensued.

The Iskra organization and Russia.—Emigration did not constitute separation. Headquarters outside Russia managed to be more effective than those within Russia which suffered from the ever-increasing surveillance of the police. Connections between leaders and workers were established, providing links through *Iskra* between Lenin and individual workers and groups of workers organized into cells. Characteristic Party patterns were first tested and incorporated at this time. It became apparent that discipline was a necessary factor for promoting successful revolutionary operations. Instituting discipline called for closer definition and clearer acceptance of lines of authority, and Lenin worked assiduously to make certain that the lines became stronger as they came more completely under his control.

Lenin was forced to fight non-revolutionary movements competing for workers' loyalty in a different type of struggle against the prevalent deplorable working conditions. This was his fight against "economism," with its evolutionary "trade union mentality." He insisted that a conspiratorial organization must be a military organization of a new sort if it hopes to achieve successful revolution, and that palliative measures such as those proposed by the economists could never achieve real gains for Russia. He further held that inasmuch as revolution was necessary, then submergence of individual wills to the military discipline required by a revolutionary Party must continue until that future date when the inevitable world revolution must occur. It is at this point that democracy, in the Western sense, was sacrificed to the program of world revolution.

Another fight had to be waged, against particularism. Local interests occasionally occupied too much of the attention of local committees and centers. *Iskra,* by being freed from purely local or provincial considerations, was an invaluable tool in raising the revolutionary movement above the level attained within the local circles.

Characteristic of all operations of the *Iskra* organization was its willingness to make temporary accommodations with any person or group, however dissimilar, whose help was needed at a

particular moment. As soon as the need passed, such incongruous alliances (sometimes they were made with Tsarist underlings) were cast off. This foreshadows one aspect of Party policy which has persisted until today, causing perplexity to those observers who do not realize that the ultimate Party goal, revolution, has never changed, even though it seemed to be deferred or renounced during these temporary adjustments made for the purpose of consolidating Party power and position.

The Second Party Congress clarified the extent to which Lenin had developed a new concept of Party organization. Lenin's beliefs were embodied in Paragraph One of the Party Rules governing membership, in the voting on which his supporters were in the minority. Instead of withdrawing, and thereby precipitating the split on this basic issue, Lenin stayed in the Congress and continued to cooperate in consideration of other matters on the agenda.

One of these issues concerned the right of Party committees to a measure of local autonomy. When this federative proposal was voted down by the Congress, one of the national groups, the Bund, and a few adherents abandoned the Congress. Thereafter Lenin and his "hard *Iskra*-ists" were able to command a majority, and consequently came to be known as "Bolsheviks" ("bolshinstvo" is Russian for "majority.") His opponents became known as "Mensheviks" (from "menshinstvo" or "minority.") These groups split over over the relatively minor matter of election to the Central Committee and the Central Organ, *Iskra*.

The Mensheviks felt that Lenin was consolidating his position too completely, and that cooperation with him according to his new ideas of Party organization would mean obliteration for all dissident tendencies. The weighing of factional pressures, a function of Western parties, was to be sacrificed to an insistence upon a harsh revolutionary centralism. Policy determination was to be a function of closed Party Congresses, the one point at which freest democratic discussion was to be permitted. Between Congresses, Party members were to be subject to unquestioning obedience of directives from Party leaders chosen to implement that policy. Non-Party Russians were to be led in directions beyond their choice.

CONCLUSIONS

Lenin was a journalist of an extremely high order. His success with *Iskra* demonstrates the potential effectiveness of a newspaper as an instrument of revolution, even though it may differ markedly from the mass-circulation media customarily recognized as successful papers. When *Iskra* became a Menshevik instrument, sometime after the Second Congress, it quickly lost much of its previous importance.

During Lenin's *Iskra* period he evolved the following concepts of "Party":

Any political party is an organized attempt to get control and keep control of a government. He developed this aspect of party operations to its ultimate revolutionary sense.

1. *Revolution is seldom spontaneous;* therefore a revolutionary Party must train its *selected* and *limited* members to plan, work, and agitate effectively together until a successful revolt, *which they can control*, is achieved. To the principle of selected personnel must be sacrificed the Western principle of open membership. Admission and expulsion are Party functions, not to be controlled by the electorate. A Party member has very clearly defined duties and obligations, as contrasted with the lack of them in Western democracies.

2. *Revolution is warfare;* therefore a revolutionary Party must be an organization with military discipline. Unity and centralization replace diffusion and particularism. The federal principle, with its "states' rights," is renounced. Revolution on the Leninist model aims at capturing *all* the organs of government. In the process, the system of checks and balances is quickly sacrificed. There are to be no checks on the central power, and there can be no balance between the supreme administrative corps and organs which are subordinated to it.

A curious deficiency exists in the system. There is no clear-cut method for selecting the executive, that man from whom stems the authority to impose revolutionary discipline.

3. *Revolution is the enemy of existing governments;* therefore a revolutionary Party must be a conspiratorial organization. It must be bold, secret, exclusive, and dependable in the performance of its self-appointed tasks, legal or illegal. Its real purposes are either hid from public and official view, or cloaked behind seeming participation in the regular processes of government when defiance would be inexpedient.

4. *Revolution is a continuing struggle;* therefore, a revolutionary Party must have as little variation as possible in program and leadership to ensure continuity of the struggle.

5. *Revolution is only one political current in a country;* therefore a revolutionary Party finds its relative strength changing to correspond with the measure of its success. The Mensheviks found that the customary and basic attitudes and procedures of all other parties must sometimes be sacrificed in the interest of self-preservation. That is, the usual party will accept the role of a minority group, and work within the existing political framework until it is able to become a majority. But when cooperation with a revolutionary Party, such as the Bolshevik organization, involves submission to it, then the prospect of winning a majority in the future is eliminated. The Bolsheviks could afford to work as a minority, because once they secured a majority, or even won power without a majority, that settled the question permanently.

It would be extremely valuable to continue this study from 1903-1912 to observe the second step in fashioning a pure Bolshevik organization, partly by planned advances and partly by unplanned failures of Lenin's attempts at compromise with the Mensheviks and others.

The succeeding steps in development of the organization, from 1912 at Prague to seizure of power in 1917, from 1917 to Lenin's death in 1924, and from 1924 to the present day, would, of course, become increasingly familiar and pertinent to current problems.

It is our opinion that the main lines of Bolshevik organization established by Lenin between 1897-1903 would carry through the whole period until the present, with only minor modification and adaptations required to meet the conditions existing at any given moment, at least until the period dominated by the figure of Stalin.

It is our further opinion that a careful estimate of the Bolshevik-Communist Party needs to be furnished us by writers who cannot be classified either as unvarying apologists or as unrelenting opponents of the organization as it exists today.

VITA

Nelson Francis Norman, son of Dr. John Frank Norman (M.D.) and Mrs. Loretta Malone Norman, was born at Crookston, Minnesota, on October 3, 1917. He was graduated from Crookston High School in 1935. His A.B. degree was conferred at Stanford University, California, in 1939 for studies in the Social Sciences. After visiting Europe with the Stanford Tour in the summer of 1939, he began his work in Medieval History at Harvard University, for which he received his A.M. degree in 1941.

While working on his doctorate in Modern European History at the University of Illinois from 1944-1948, he first served for two years as Chief Announcer at Radio Station WILL, and as Instructor in Radio Journalism, and then two years as Assistant in English and European History. He is a member of Delta Sigma Rho and Phi Alpha Theta.

Other professional experience includes acting as Transportation Coordinator at Vought-Sikorsky Aircraft Corporation in Stratford, Connecticut, and as Radio Announcer at WMEX, Boston, Massachusetts.

He was married to Dorothy Margaret Selfridge, of Andover, Massachusetts, on September 25, 1944. They have two sons, Kenneth Gerard Norman and Douglas Ford Norman.

In September, 1948, he joined the faculty of the University of Illinois as Instructor in History.